The Theological Seminary
of
The University of Dubuque

presents

The Inaugural address of

Donald Bloesch, Ph. D.

Associate Professor of Theology

entitled

The Christian Life In The Plan Of Salvation

February 7, 1962

The Installation address of

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The Historical-Critical Method In The Work In Interpreting The Scriptures

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THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE PLAN OF SALVATION

Donald G. Bloesch

A perennial question in systematic theology is the role of the Christian life in our salvation. Much attention has been given in the history of theology to the relation between ethics and soteriology, but for the most part the efforts to bring together these two disciplines have not been theologically sound. On the one hand, there is that strand of theology which has made salvation contingent on the Christian life. This aberration has appeared in Catholic theology and also in the pietistic strand of Protestantism. On the other hand, there are those theologians who are inclined to separate salvation from the Christian life. This latter deviation can be found in post-Reformation orthodoxy and in neo-Reformation theology, especially in its earlier phases.

The purpose of this paper is to reinterpret the plan of salvation in such a way as to give more significance to the Christian life in our salvation. There will be an attempt to hold in tension the evangelical emphasis on free grace and the Catholic concern for the holy life. At the same time we will try to avoid the Catholic error of making salvation contingent on the Christian life. We will also seek to avoid the error of severing the Christian life from salvation, an error which can be detected even in the Reformers.

The Christian life must be seen as an integral part of our salvation. Too often in the thinking of those who adhere to Reformation theology the Christian life is regarded as a by-product of our salvation or as an outward sign of our salvation. It is in accord with biblical thinking to maintain that salvation is not only extrinsic, but also intrinsic. Salvation, and this includes every facet of salvation—justification, sanctification, and glorification—takes place not only outside of us, but also within us. The traditional view in Protestant theological history has been to regard justification as extrinsic and sanctification as intrinsic. But biblical scholars are now telling us that justification **(dikaiosune)** means more than mere forgiveness. It means "being in Christ."[1] Righteousness is not simply imputed (as some of our forefathers maintained), but also imparted. It might be more true to the Reformation to speak of righteousness as being "ingrafted" into us.

This is to say that salvation has both an objective and a subjective

pole. The objective pole signifies the work of God in Christ on Calvary. The subjective pole is equivalent to the Christian life. The kingdom, in other words, is not only a gift, but also a task. The doctrine of salvation is compromised unless both of these realities are held together in creative tension.

The Christian life can be considered significant because it is a contributing element to our final salvation. To be sure justification in the forensic sense is prior to the Christian life, but even the divine act of forgiveness has no efficacy unless it is actualized in the life of the believer. The foundation of our salvation can be said to be the incarnation culminating in the sacrifice on Calvary. The consummation of our salvation is the final triumph of Christ at the end of history. The arena of our salvation is none other than the Christian life. The death on the cross assures us of salvation, but in order to lay hold of this assurance we must bear the cross. We must work out our salvation in fear and trembling. This is to say we must strive to live the Christian life.

This now brings us to the question whether there is a plan or order of salvation. It is my contention that there is a plan of salvation, but this plan is hidden from the senses. Paul describes it in Eph. 1:9, 10 as a mystery, but a mystery that has been made known to the believer. It is barred from the senses, but it can be known partially by faith.

The Christian can express this mystery only in terms of the paradox of election and decision. "Paradox" as it is being used in this essay is a category by which one can discern the significance of eternal truth. Kierkegaard defined a paradox as "an ontological definition which expresses the relation between an existing cognitive spirit and eternal truth."[2] The paradox invariably takes the form of a contradictory statement. Yet the contradiction is due to the limitations of our reason. In God's sight there is no contradiction. The offense of the paradox is due to the pretensions of our reason.

The category of paradox is admittedly philosophical in origin, but a philosophical category can be made to serve the Word of God. This category is certainly not foreign to the inner meaning of the Bible, since paradoxical statements abound in the Bible. It can be said that this category definitely lends itself to theological appropriation. Stendahl maintains that strictly logical thinking is alien to the world of the Bible. He writes: "Over against stringent logic stands Jewish thinking in images, where contradictory facts and conceptions can be put together in a kind of significant mosaic."[3]

Kierkegaard, who helped theology recapture the meaning of paradox, contended that there is only one paradox that is absolute. This is the paradox of God in man and man in God in Jesus Christ. In theological circles this is known as the Christological paradox. But this paradox can also be regarded as a soteriological paradox. It signifies both the divine election of Jesus Christ and his obedient decision. In that Christ is not only our Savior, but also our Pattern, the fulfillment of our vocation can be said to be analogous to the realization of His vocation. This means that the salvation that we receive as well as the salvation that He accomplished can be expressed only in paradoxical language.

Unfortunately most theological systems are not oriented about the paradoxes of Christ and salvation. Whereas the facets of salvation are interrelated, theologians have tended to separate them or arrange them in logical sequence. This is true particularly since the Enlightenment. We can here see the influence of Descartes who maintained that clarity is the norm for truth. It was Descarte's view that an idea is not valid unless it is clear and concise. But it must be recognized that natural reason in every age craves a logical, air-tight system. It is the very nature of reason to shrink from mystery.

The concept of the order of salvation **(ordo salutis)** connotes an attempt to explain the paradox. This concept played an important role in Reformed and Lutheran orthodoxy. The theologians of orthodoxy were right in maintaining that there is a sequence in our salvation. But they did not fully discern the fact that every facet of salvation partakes of this sequence.

There have been various interpretations of the **ordo salutis** in the history of the church. One can already find an attempt to enumerate the different facets of salvation in Rom. 8:28-30. First there is foreknowledge, then predestination, then calling, then justification, and finally glorification. Some theologians have placed the atonement after predestination and sanctification after justification. What many overlook is that in verse twenty-eight Paul avers that God calls those who love Him, thus not closing the door to human responsibility. Verse twenty-nine centers about Jesus Christ. This verse tells us that our predestination has no meaning apart from our conformity to the image of His Son.

In the sixteenth century the Council of Trent attempted to state the Roman Catholic position on the order of salvation. Aristotelian categories were employed to make this order intelligible. The final cause of our salvation is spoken of as the glory of God and Jesus

Christ. The efficient cause is the merciful God who washes and sanctifies and anoints us with His Spirit. The meritorious cause is Jesus Christ. The instrumental cause is the sacrament of Holy Baptism. The formal cause is the justice of God whereby He makes us just through the Holy Spirit. Although it is true that the relationship between these causes is very complex and that each cause is present on every level, there is a question whether this kind of explanation adequately safeguards the mystery in the divine plan.

Calvin and Luther were more true to the paradoxical nature of the plan of salvation, but they too often sought to rationalize this plan. Luther in his **The Bondage of the Will** certainly loses sight of the paradox in his reduction of man to an automaton. The influence of Aristotle's philosophy can be seen in Calvin's attempt to explain the sequence of salvation in Book II of the **The Institutes.**[4] Calvin states that the efficient cause of our salvation is the love of God the Father; the material cause is the obedience of the Son; the formal cause is the illumination of the Spirit or faith; the final cause is the glory of God's great generosity. Here one can discern the bent towards objectivism in Calvin's theology.

Benjamin Warfield, who represents the infralapsarian strand in Calvinist orthodoxy, also sought to explain the order of salvation in objectivistic terms. Warfield states his position in his book **The Plan of Salvation.** First, he said, there is the divine permission for the fall; then follows the election of some to life in Christ. After this is the gift of Christ for the redemption of the elect. Then there is the gift of the Holy Spirit to save the redeemed. Finally we have the sanctification of the redeemed.

Karl Barth has subjected the soteriology of the Reformation to a radical reappraisal. He has rightly seen that salvation must be grounded in Christ, rather than a secret decree in the mind of God. According to Barth the election, justification, and sanctification of all men took place in the life and death of Jesus Christ. At the same time Barth maintains that our salvation must be appropriated in faith and love. The goal of salvation is said to be glorification. It is significant that Barth continues to hold onto the conception of extrinsic justification which means justification takes place completely outside ourselves.

We suggest an order of salvation which mirrors the dynamic and paradoxical character of the biblical proclamation. Because there is an infinite qualitative difference between God and man (cf. Kierkegaard), there are really two perspectives of the order of salvation, a human and divine. It can be shown that these two perspectives or two orders

are held together in paradoxical relation throughout the Bible. From the human or temporal side, our salvation begins in seeking for help. The next step is repentance and faith. Then there is obedience in faith culminating in the final step—perfect love. The eternal order is slightly different. First we have predestination, then justification, then sanctification, and finally glorification. The two perspectives are pictured below:

Temporal Order	Eternal Order
seeking for help	predestination
repentance and faith	justification
obedience in faith	sanctification
perfect love	glorification

Certain remarks must be made about this picture of salvation. First of all, it must be recognized that the four facets of salvation within each order are correlative with each other. For example, seeking for help is correlative with predestination, and repentance and faith are related to justification. Also we must point out that the prior terms include the others. Seeking for help includes repentance, obedience, and even perfect love. Predestination includes justification, sanctification, and glorification. We must also affirm that the four categories in the eternal order have no meaning apart from Christ. We are predestined, justified, and sanctified in Christ. But God the Father and the Holy Spirit also play a role in our salvation. Our salvation takes place in Christ, but the sacrifice of Christ is made possible by the compassion of the Father, and it is made efficacious by the action of the Holy Spirit. Our salvation is **in** the Son, but it is **from** the Father and **through** the Holy Spirit.

What we have attempted to do is to enumerate certain dominant categories, but there are many other facets of our salvation that might have been included. We need only mention here adoption, mystical union, effectual calling, and the sacraments. It can be shown, however, that all of these facets can be subsumed under one or more of the categories in our presentation. For example, we can say that one begins to seek for help at the moment of Baptism and that a life of repentance is made possible by Holy Communion.

It is not wrong to make sense of God's revelation so long as we do not try to explain it away. The revelation is still a mystery. Yet, as Kierkegaard maintained, we should seek to use our reason to show that we cannot understand fully. The plan of salvation, as we have presented it, still remains a mystery. The two orders of salvation, the divine and the temporal, can be brought together only in paradoxical

language. This means that the predestined can be properly described only in terms of those who seek for help. The sanctified can be understood only in terms of those who obey. The inverse of both of these propositions can also be affirmed and can be said to be equally in accord with biblical thinking.

This position must not be confused with synergism. In this view God not only takes the initiative, but He also follows through. Yet man is active also from the beginning to the end. The temporal order describes man's activity; the divine order refers only to God's activity. But it is important to note that man's activity is grounded in God's activity. Predestination is nothing else but divine election by means of human decision. Yet man's decision does not rest on free will, but rather on free grace. From our side the decision of faith will appear to be, in Barth's words, "a leap into the darkness of the unknown."[5] From the divine side the decision of faith must be viewed in terms of irresistible grace. We are not trying to dissolve the paradox, but rather we are letting the paradox remain a paradox.

The view that is being presented in this paper is not only paradoxical, but also dialectical. This is to say, we are making an attempt to hold together the objective and subjective poles of our salvation. The synthesis is only in the future. Now we must walk by faith. It must be said that the dialectic that we envisage involves Christ and the new man, not the old man. The dialectical engagement takes place between Christ and the man in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. The Holy Spirit must be viewed as being the only point of contact between Christ and man. Otherwise we would again be back in the morass of synergism and Pelagianism.

This view can also be considered dynamic. It seeks to relate the work on the cross to concrete human experience. We have not died with Christ unless we live with Him in the complexities and agonies of the world about us. We have not risen with Christ unless we suffer with Him in this same world.

What are the theological implications of this position, which might be described as a biblical dynamic view? First of all, the foundation of our salvation is Jesus Christ rather than a secret decree of God (against Reformed orthodoxy). Again, the reality of salvation can be affirmed only for those who have faith (against Barth). We can also say that faith is not a mere instrument of salvation, but a pre-condition of salvation (against Calvin).

The most significant implication is that the Christian life is the

arena of our salvation. To be sure, in one sense we can also regard the life and death of Jesus Christ as the arena of redemption. But in the context of this discussion it is better to refer to the work of Christ as the foundation of our salvation—meaning here not simply the starting point, but the ground or objective reality of our salvation. The Christian life must be viewed as being organically related to and rooted in this other crucial sphere of action. At the same time the Christian life must be recognized as being equally indispensable for our salvation.

The Reformers, and even more their followers, tended to sever the Christian life from salvation as a reaction against works-righteousness. They rightly protested against making the divine act of mercy contingent on the Christian life. But they became too objectivistic. For the churches of the Reformation Christian belief became more important than the Christian life. In our view the Christian life does not purchase salvation, but it is the arena in which our salvation is carried forward to victory. With the Reformers we hold that we are justified by grace and not by works. But we are justified **for** works, and therefore the goal of justification might be said to be realized through works.

The position of this paper becomes clearer after a perusal of the theological implications of the classical Reformed view of salvation. In that view we find the doctrines of both the limited atonement and extrinsic justification. The foundation of salvation is held to be a secret decree of God. The Christian life is regarded as an effect or fruit of our salvation, and not a cause of salvation. In our view the fruit is organically related to the root. If we say that the Christian life contributes to our salvation, this actually means that the Holy Spirit contributes to our salvation. The works of the Christian are nothing else than the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Pietism signified a bold attempt to reclaim the role of the Christian life in our salvation. The pietists rightly saw that salvation is not only something done for man, but also something done in man. Yet they lost sight of the fact that only Christ lives the authentic Christian life. Only He is the sanctified man and the "new man" in the full sense of these words.

In order to hold in tension the role of the Christian life and the gift of grace manifested in Christ, it is necessary to give closer attention to the paradox of salvation. Bonhoeffer sees this paradox primarily in terms of the gift of faith and the work of obedience. Bonhoeffer expresses this paradox very cogently: "Only he who believes is obedient; and only he who is obedient believes."[6] According to Bonhoeffer if we stress the first half of this proposition only, then we have cheap grace.

If we emphasize only the second part, then we have salvation by works.

If we would relate the event of Calvary to the obedience of the Christian, the paradox might be stated in the following manner: "We can obey only through the power of the cross; the cross becomes efficacious only as we obey." Here we can see not only the perils of cheap grace and works-righteousness, but also the perils of objectivism and subjectivism. Both parts of this proposition must be affirmed if we are to do justice to the dynamic and paradoxical nature of Christian salvation.

The paradox essentially is that we in ourselves contribute nothing to our salvation; yet in Christ we contribute everything. Paul said: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). We can do all things when we rest in Christ who empowers us. This means that we are most active when we are most passive. Loyola discerned the paradox when he maintained that we should work as if everything depended on ourselves, but pray as if everything depended on God.

The works that we do in Christ must be considered the fruits of grace or the fruits of faith, not the works of the law. We are the branches, but we must bear fruit. If we do not bear fruit, we are cast forth and burned (Jn. 15:5, 6). The fruit is intimately related to the root, and therefore the fruit does contribute to our final salvation. Alien righteousness and actual righteousness must be viewed as being organically connected.

It can be seen that we hold that Christ alone accomplishes our salvation **(solus Christus).** But Christ must not be separated from faith and obedience or else we have cheap grace. When we speak of Christ alone, we must have in mind not only Christ on the cross, but also Christ in our ongoing daily experience. Christ must not be isolated from the Holy Spirit. The locus of salvation is not only the atonement, but also the experience of the church.

The position of this paper is also in accord with justification by faith alone **(sola fide.)** But it is a faith that does not stand alone, but which bears fruit. In the mind of Paul **pistis** signifies not mere belief, but faithfulness. Its full meaning is life-long loyalty to Jesus Christ. Calvin contended that we are saved by faith and not by works, but yet not without works. Faith must be grounded in Christ and fulfilled in obedience. Only this kind of faith justifies and saves us.

Again, with the Reformation we adhere to justification by grace alone **(sola gratia).** But it is a grace that realizes itself in faithful works. Bonhoeffer wrote: "The only man who has the right to say that he is

justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ."[7] This means that there is no grace apart from a Christian life. Yet since the Christian life is none other than Christ living in us, the glory must be given not to the Christian but to Christ.

The perils today are works-righteousness and cheap grace. Both of these deviations can be seen to be two sides of the same coin which might be labeled "easy salvation." If salvation is located completely outside of ourselves, either in a secret decree, or in the historical atonement, or in baptism, or in the church, then grace becomes cheap. On the other hand, if we locate salvation in what we do, in our good works, or our decisions, or our piety, then we have works-righteousness.

There is need today to recapture the paradoxical character of the plan of salvation and the events of salvation. Anyone can affirm a paradox. But to hold onto the paradox in working out one's faith is a very difficult task. If we avoid the paradox, then we blur the scandal of the cross. Then we have not the simple Gospel, but a simplified Gospel.

To hold onto the paradox is primarily a matter not of understanding, but of confession and obedience. To affirm the paradox means the abdication of the understanding so that faith might live. But this does not entail the abandoning of reason. Indeed, a zeal without knowledge is blind (Rom. 10:2). We must use our reason to show that faith transcends the understanding. Reason must be made the servant of faith. We should bow before the mystery of faith. The norm for truth must be viewed as faithful reasoning or fidelity, not clarity. We must strive to think as mature Christians, but we are called to trust and believe as little children.

1. Gottfried Quell and Gottlob Schrenk. **Righteousness.** (London: Adams & Charles Black, 1951) pp. 46 ff.
2. Soren Kierkegaard, **The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard.** Ed. & trans. Alexander Dru. (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 194.
3. Anton Fridrichsen et. al. **The Root of the Vine.** (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), p. 67.
4. John Calvin. **Institutes of the Christian Religion.** Ed. John McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. III, 14, 21. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 787.
5. Karl Barth, **The Epistle to the Romans.** Trans. from the sixth edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns. (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 98.
6. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, **The Cost of Discipleship.** Unabridged edition. Trans. R. H. Fuller. (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1959), p. 54.
7. **Ibid.,** p. 43.

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THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD IN THE WORK OF INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES

by C. Howard Wallace, D. Theol.

Some eight hundred fifty years ago, Bernard of Clairvaux wrote: "A knowledge of literature is an ornament of the soul, which it both instructs and makes capable of instructing others. The liberal arts are honorable and useful subjects to study or to practice. But both are unnecessary for salvation, that is, for the knowledge of Truth in itself: and so both must be considered optional subjects in the monk's curriculum. The same applies to portions of theology, such as that concerning the nature of angels. Particularly useless and frivolous is philosophy. Its subject-matter is foolish; its doctrines are false; and its teachers are interested less in the truth than in their own reputation as philosophers. Particularly useful and indispensable on the other hand, is the study of the sacred scriptures, which are full of divine mysteries and overflowing with celestial sweetness, provided the reader knows how to suck honey out of the rock and oil out of the flinty rock. In them and in the writings of the Fathers will be found such wisdom as can be learned from books."[1]

While we may temper our judgment of philosophers in this century because we are spared the task of dealing with the excesses of medieval metaphysicians, we can only agree that the study of the scriptures is both useful and indispensable. For centuries now since the first embryonic stages of the canonization of New Testament writings, whenever the people of God have met seriously to consider their roles in that time of history in which they lived, there has been a central emphasis on the authority of the scriptures—both Old Testament and New Testament. And St. Bernard's qualification of his statement, "provided the reader knows how to suck honey out of the rock and oil out of the flinty rock" has remained the perennial question of all those who go to Holy Writings for guidance. What is a proper methodology for the study of the Bible? But the question must be raised more sharply and more specifically than this! What is a proper methodology for the study of the Bible for those of us who find ourselves in the Reformed tradition of the Church in the second half of the twentieth century?

The earth turns! It is trite to say it, but too important not to say it in terms of some of the implications for Biblical studies. There was a time, and not too long ago, when a cosmology was held that enabled

people to believe in a place called heaven, literally and spacially located within the universe. And likewise, there was a firm conviction that Hell was in the same manner, a spacially-located area. It is difficult for us in these latter days to assess the personal sacrifice of a long line of astronomers, geographers, and geologists who changed the picture for us! As far out as we can peer with Mt. Palomar's 200 inch telescope, we can find no spacially-located heaven. Our earth is but a small planet in a solar system which is only a speck in a larger galaxy which itself is but one of an infinite number of other galaxies. Recently, plans were announced that an expedition soon will go out to cut through the earth's crust from the vantage point of the ocean floor. But no one any longer seriously expects to break into the domain of the Adversary when this happens. Our picture of the universe is not that of the writers of the Bible, not that of Jesus, himself, nor is it even that of the Reformers who instigated the Confessions which have become standards in our branch of the Church.[2]

There was a time, and not too long ago, when the first chapter of Genesis could be read by a devout Christian who could believe that God **did** create the world and all things in it in six days of twenty-four hours each! But the publication of Darwin's **The Origin of Species** in the middle part of the last century started a chain of reactions which continue with us to the present day. It is now generally believed that life as we know it evolved over millenia of years, that cellular structures adapted themselves over a long period of time into the forms of life which we now see about us—even the form of Man! This new way of looking at things has sharply challenged traditional interpretation of the Bible. And in this area alone, the lack of a satisfactory settlement of the issue has cost the Church of Jesus Christ thousands of men and women who are sensitive to new knowledge accumulating in the twentieth century, and who feel that once again the Church has refused to open itself to the riches of Creation. For these people, the Church is an anachronism, irrelevant to the real life of our times.

There was a time, and not long ago, when people believed that persons could be judged solely on the basis of their overt actions—that mind was governed by will. To make a mistake, then, was not to will hard enough toward a certain goal. The Hebrews with their peculiarly characteristic Semitic way of looking at things, spoke of the "heart" as part of the "Soul"; the heart was the precursor of action, hence the seat of will.[3] If one "lays it to heart" something happens; if it is not

"laid to heart", nothing happens. Thus, in Malachi 2:2 we can read:

> "If you will not listen,
> If you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name,
> I will send a curse upon you."

And a common interpretation of that great verse, John 3:16 involves believing as willing to believe: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever **believes** on him should not perish but have eternal life."[4] But the simple world of mind responding to will has been shattered by Freud, Jung, and their heirs. The mind is like an iceberg—only part of it visible. There is a vast subconscious which determines our actions in large measure, and which gives us or takes away from us health and peace. Neither the writers of the Bible nor the Reformers had access to the world of twentieth century psychiatry.

The earth turns! The cosmology of the twentieth century is not that of the Bible. The origins of the universe are viewed by us in a way quite removed from Biblical authors. The heights and depths of the human mind, with all that means in inter-personal relationships and in social concepts, are being uncovered in ways which challenge traditional interpretations of scriptures.

And yet, the Westminster Confession of Faith states: "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God."[5] "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak most clearly."[6] And, "The Supreme Judge, by whom all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture."[7]

In the light, then, of a principal symbol in our Reformed tradition, we need to be honest in assessing certain methods of Biblical study. The given, in the sense of "that which is", for those of us who have been ordained in the United Presbyterian Church and who continue to labor within it—therefore subject to the counsel and discipline of the brethren of the various Courts of the Church—the given is a doctrine of scripture which we must come to terms with, or gracefully leave behind. The framework, then, of the acceptance or rejection of any method of

Bible Study must be the framework of certain presuppositions.

Any discipline, whether it be that of Theology, Philosophy, or Biblical Interpretation, rests upon certain presuppositions. We are free to argue about the presuppositions, and even free to reject them. But it should be understood by all concerned that any consistent viewing of a book as, for example, the Bible, depends on just such a base of presuppositions. At this point, I freely admit my own. And they are not, I should hope, incompatible with the symbols of the United Presbyterian Church. I approach the Bible with three presuppositions.

The first is that the God of the Old Testament is one and the same as the God of the New Testament. This means that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments that together comprise the Holy Bible are essentially one.

The second presupposition, based upon evidence in the Scriptures themselves, is that God works in history through people. The clear implication here is that always there is the human element involved in the recognition or the reception of revelation.

And the third presupposition is that God has a plan or a scheme for our salvation, and for the salvation of all creation. The central and definitive act in this scheme is the revelation of Himself in the Son, even Jesus Christ, our Lord. Everything in the scheme points forward or backward to this event which, in effect split time itself.[8] God "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:7-11)

In summation of these presuppositions, then, we are confronted with a God, as witnessed to in the Scriptures, who takes history seriously. He called a real Abraham who lived in a real world, and he made his covenant with the poor Israelites. He called a real Moses who had real problems, and he led a real people from bondage out of Egypt. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." (Exodus 20:2) "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumped gloriously; the horse and the Rider he has thrown into the sea." (Exodus 15:1b) Kingdoms rise and fall at the behest and judgment of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Prophets are called against their will to speak the Word of this God to people who are confused

and who have gone astray. And finally, through the back door of the world into a smelly stable, in a manner so earthy as to offend our sensibilities, God comes in the form of a human being. And thus, He is so identified with the process of history, so identified with us who live in history, that in His Son He dies. In this whole business of the Incarnation, God involves Himself so deeply in the real history of our world, that we flee from its reality. And then in the shattering of all that previously had been known in history, God, so to speak, sprang the lock on age-old bonds and fetters on that Easter morning. And the Church was brought into being as the special vehicle by which the mystery of God's concern for us in Christ might be perpetuated! And the Church is a phenomenon of History!

I emphasize God's involvement in history primarily to give a rationale, if one is indeed needed, for the historical-critical method of Bible study. One can find in the Incarnation the theological justification, indeed the theological **imperative,** for an approach to Bible study which takes history seriously. The historical-critical method is simply an approach to Scriptures which does this very thing.

The contextual study of the Bible immediately involves us in asking such questions as, "Who wrote this particular account?" "When was it written?" "What possible traditions are here involved?" "What was the situation in Israel, or in the Church, which evoked this writing?" Such questions occur when we think historically, and questions once raised do not have the habit of disappearing until they are dealt with. And in the answering of just such questions some ancient and time-honored conceptions have been shattered. Hence, there has been a real reluctance on the part of some people, usually in the very conservative theological circles, to accept answers which come from the use of new tools in the historical investigation of the pages of the Bible.

Modern historical-critical study undoubtedly got its impetus from the Age of the Enlightenment, which in turn was a by-product of the Renaissance. With the burgeoning of interest in classical studies and classical history, and with a steady accretion of knowledge about ancient times, this lively interest in the past was bound to spill over into the area of Biblical studies. Two seventeenth century pioneers in the area were Hugo Grotius (died in 1645) and Spinoza (died in 1677). Building upon their work, a Parisian Roman Catholic priest, Richard Simon (died 1712) wrote what now is generally regarded as the first modern critical work of the Bible (New Testament). His three-Volume work which was published in Rotterdam ran to over 2000 pages. In 1689 Volume I was published, **Histoire Critique du Texte du Nouveau Testament**; Volume II in 1690. **Histoire Critique des Versions du Nouveau**

Testament; and Volume III in 1693, **Histoire Critique des principaux commentateurs du Nouveau Testament.** I mention this definitive work to indicate that the historical-critical method of Bible study is not something confined to our century, although there have been increasing numbers of tools available and increasing refinements of the tools during the past hundred years.[9] In his time, Simon could raise questions about individual Greek styles of the Gospel writers, could compare these styles with general characteristics of Hellenistic Greek, could indicate the variety and possible progressions in the history of the texts,[10] and he could raise these questions freely with a minimum amount of the traditional defense of dogma. Of course, it was a joy that his studies convinced him that the text could be defended against "Jews, heretics, and philosophers." But poor Spinoza already was dead. Simon's work was what the Germans call a "wissenschaftliche Arbeit". And immediately Roman Catholics and Protestants alike rose up to condemn him in his approach. The common complaint was that he was infringing upon the authority of the Scriptures by his investigations and his observations.[11]

As a matter of fact, this complaint still is with us. Moreover the cry has been intensified from the far right since the work of those in the last century such as Ferdinand Christian Bauer (died 1860), founder of the so-called Tübingen School,[12] and Julius Wellhausen (died 1918) who spent the last years of his teaching in Göttingen. Bauer and his Tübingen School destroyed any illusions about the inherent literary unity of the New Testament. He scattered its pieces throughout two centuries, and characterized the writings as "occasional writings" by various religious personalities, each with different problems, perspectives, and goals. The only way in which the New Testament can make sense, so Bauer maintained, is to view the various books as products of the developing history of the Church. Thus, the New Testament writings are primarily reflections of the Church as it met its problems, formed battle lines to defend itself, or went on the offensive theologically. And the key to the development of the early Church, according to the Tübingen School, was the titanic struggle between Paul and his free, universal Christianity, as over against those who were wanting to keep closer to the Law, i.e. the Judaizers. As the battle was being won, the present 27 books of the New Testament were being canonized. Certain radical excesses of this School have since been corrected with the general opinion now that most books of the New Testament were written by the end of the first century, and the remaining ones very early in the second century. And Pauline authorship of many of the letters attributed to him has been re-affirmed. By the tools of the historical-critical method, the books of the New Testament are

now irrevocably seen as witnesses of a Church which existed in a very real world with very real problems, witnesses which point to the meaning of what God had done through Jesus Christ, His Son.

And Wellhausen, in his monumental **Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels**[13], demonstrated that Moses no longer could be considered the author of the Pentateuch. He proposed the hypothesis that the present first five books of the Bible were the end result of the interweaving of four literary strands which he designated J, E, D, and P. From the writing of J, the oldest, to P, the youngest, was a passage of time which amounted to between four hundred and five hundred years. Henceforth, generations of theological students would need to learn the meaning and the implications of Wellhausen's hypothesis. The end result of it is that in the Old Testament the historical-critical method has underlined and emphasized the dynamic actions of God with His people, Israel. Leaders of this people are seen to have witnessed to their God at various times through the perspective of their own ages.

The full implications of taking history seriously can be realized only when one holds to a conception of Revelation which takes into account the human element involved in the reception of Revelation. This means that the Bible itself, i.e., the Words of the Bible, are not Revelation in and of themselves. The words, the events, the incidents recounted serve to **point to** God. Or, to put it another way, the Bible is a witness to God's revelation among people, and to the definitive revelation in Jesus Christ. For every revelation there must be a receiver of that revelation, i.e., some human element involved. The Speaker can never be witnessed to, unless He is heard. And the hearers are people. Once we postulate this, then the historical-critical method of Bible study is an absolute necessity in order to reconstruct as precisely as possible the context of the writing so that the proper clues may be uncovered. Otherwise, we may too readily bring to the Bible our own prejudices, our own opinions, and in looking into its pages, now glossed over with our own attitudes, see reflected back only the image of ourselves. The historical-critical method, at this point, is a most conservative approach to Bible study; it is designed to recover for us and conserve for us, the clues of how God at particular times in history moved among real people. As such, it operates as a controlling influence on exegesis.

Those contemporary exegetes who distrust the historical-critical approach do so on the grounds of dogma. Revelation, for them, is something objective, and is thus objectively found in the Bible. Their theory of inspiration of the Scriptures is that God so inspired men to write the various books of the Bible that the Bible, itself, is objective

revelation. And thus, in these books, in the particular, sacred words of these books, there is revelation from which pure dogma may be constructed. And once the system is perfected, then the dogmas themselves become absolute criteria for the interpretation of the Scriptures. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth can well be seen in this light. By some it has been made into an essential doctrine of the Church. And without adherence to a biologically literal interpretation on the part of the believer, the whole system of such interpretation is destroyed. The fact that it is mentioned in only two of the Gospel accounts (Matthew and Luke), and is ignored in the other two Gospels, not to speak of all the letters of St. Paul,[14] does not bother those who insist upon the doctrine of the Virgin Birth as an essential doctrine of the Church. For to them revelation is objectively in the Bible itself, and in a sense, all on the same plane. Contextual study of the passages, i.e., the historical-critical approach, makes not a whit of difference to an already-developed system of dogma.

At this point these people are heirs of the Greeks. The Greeks thought statically in terms of eternal and unchangeable principles which were at rest and not in any way moving or in dynamic relationships with people.[15] But the Scriptures are not Greek books—even those which happen to be in the Greek language, thanks to Alexander the Great and the subsequent Hellenization of the Near East. The Bible was written by people whose thought patterns and whose viewpoints were Semitic. And a primary characteristic of Hebrew thought is its dynamic quality; there is a continual flux of events in history; there is a God who continually impinges upon the real world of people who inhabit real bodies. This God is forever acting, judging, giving mercy; and when the time comes for **the** definitive revelation of Himself, He comes not in a ray of light, but as real flesh and blood man, within history! God acts in history. And to the extent that we regard God's revelation in the Bible as self-contained, hence, static, we are heirs of the Greeks, and imposing a viewpoint upon the Bible which is not there on internal grounds. And to the extent that we see the Bible as a witness of real men to God's **activities** among them, we are heirs of the Hebrews and true to the perspective of the Bible itself. The clues to the work of a dynamic God can be recovered only by taking history seriously, and that means the pursuance of the historical-critical method of Bible study.

It may be helpful now to outline briefly the steps of exegesis of, for example, an Old Testament passage. These presuppose the use of the historical-critical method and its tools. And we may rightly ask, "How do these fit in with the symbols of our Church in terms of the Bible?"

1. The text must be determined. Much work has been done in this century by Nestle in the New Testament, and by Kittel in the Old Testament. And most of us will have to rely upon the years of work and research which they and their predecessors have done in giving to us the best attested text.

2. A careful translation must be made. Here the life-long work of a host of lexicographers and grammarians are at hand. Gesenius, Davidson, Köhler, and Baumgartner are hallowed names in this area. Ugaritic and other cuneiform languages are continually yielding up treasures which enable us to do the actual work of translation in more faithful ways. It is a great joy to me that this Theological Seminary still requires the study of Hebrew and Greek for the B.D. degree. We have no illusions about turning out great philologists in our courses. We do still feel that some mastery of the tools of translation, plus a knowledge of the use of lexicons and dictionaries, will give a sensitivity to nuances and oft-overlooked meanings of Biblical passages.

3. The nature of the material must be determined. This will push us one way or another in terms of interpretation. An example is the material of Genesis 1-11, called **Urgeschichte,** or primeval history, by many. It is myth in the sense that it is unverifiable by twentieth century historical standards. Yet it is a carrier of truth in a way which is unparalleled by any other language vehicle. The Bible is not a science textbook; it is a book about God and His dealings with men in history. Thus, the nature of the material, which can be ascertained and illumined by the historical-critical method, is important in preserving the integrity of the Bible.

4. The passage must be compared with similar materials and accounts of other Near-Eastern countries in order to see the parallels and the uniqueness of the witness. It is over against such accounts that the mind of the writer may better be fathomed.

5. The context of the passage must be determined as precisely as possible. When was it written? What was the situation in Israel? What is the purpose of the writing?

6. What is the connection between the passage and God's revelation in Jesus Christ? Can we by looking through the Christ event see more clearly the clues which reveal the God of the Old Covenant, the same God who manifested himself in Jesus Christ?

The last step is the most difficult, and one which cannot be bought cheaply. Allegory and typology may too easily short-circuit the connec-

tion which will enable us to see more clearly the dynamism of God's activity in history. Allegory which presumes that scripture has not only a surface, literal meaning but also a hidden, allegorical meaning (as evidenced by the work of Philo and countless others) is dangerous because it may lead much too easily to isogesis, i.e., the adjustment of scripture to our own viewpoints or metaphysical bases. That certain types in the Old Testament seem to be precursors of types emerging in the New Testament may have a germ of truth in it, for the people of the New Testament were well aware of their heritage. But again the dangers of too-easy equation of Old Testament concepts with pet doctrines of the New Testament, as developed in latter day systems of theology, destroys the dynamic of God at work at particular times with real people in definite places.

The Word of God referred to, then, in the Westminster Confession[16] must be seen as a dynamic Word, spoken by God from time to time in His acts of creation, in His dealings with Israel, and most definitively in His Son Jesus Christ. It is to **this** dynamic Word that the Confession as symbol points, and the principal witness to it is the Holy Bible. "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself."[17] By use of the historical-critical method the integrity of the Scriptures may be maintained in that the categories of the Scriptures become the norm for seeing a God who acts. And "the Supreme Judge . . . . none other than the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture",[18] can best be listened to, perceived and understood by viewing Scripture in its various historical contexts.

Notes

1. **The Steps of Humility** by Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, Translated by George Bosworth Burch, Cambridge, Massochusetts, Harvard University Press, 1942, p. 38
2. Examples The Scottish Confession of 1560; The Heidelberg Catechism of 1563; The Helvetic Confessions of 1536 and 1566; The Westminster Confession of 1646.
3. Cf. "Heart" and "Soul" in J. Pedersen, **Israel, Its Life and Culture** (4 Vol.), London, Oxford University Press, 1926
4. Certainly there are overtones in the Greek verb **pisteuein** which would indicate a sense of trust or reliance. But this aspect is overlooked by many who prefer to see a manisfestation of "will" here.
5. Chapter I, Section 4
6. Chapter I, Section 9
7. Chapter I, Section 10
8. The idea is well-developed in Oscar Cullmann, **Christ and Time,** Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1950
9. These include a new knowledge of philology due to thorough study of Near-Eastern cognate languages of Hebrew, including whole new worlds of cuneiform studies; a vast advance in understanding of the cultures of the ancient Near-East; more precise methodolgy in literary criticism; and the relatively recent birth of modern archaeology with its stratigraphic method

coupled with pottery study. The latter tool has been the delight and the dismay of Biblical scholars.

10. It should be noted that Erasmus had done much work along this line a century and a half before Simon. And although Luther distrusted Erasmus with exhuberant passion, he was quite willing to use the Greek New Testament text of Erasmus for the translation of his "deutsche Bibel".
11. More details about this writer and subsequent scholars who pioneered in the historical-critical method may be found in Adolf Julicher, **Einleitung in das Neue Testament,** 7. Abteilung, Tubingen, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1931, pp. 1ff; and in Hans-Joachim Kraus, **Geschichte der Historisch-Critischen Erforshung des Alten Testaments,** Neukirchen, Kreis Moers, 1956
12. The primary publications of this school were the **Theologischen Jahrbücher** 1842-1857.
13. Published in 1883 as the Second Edition of **Geschichte Israels** (1878).
14. In contrast to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, mention of which is found over and over again throughout the New Testament, and which theme also was the crux of apostolic preaching.
15. Cf. Thorleif Boman, **Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek,** Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960; and Jules Moreau, **Language and Religious Language,** Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1961—especially Chapter I.
16. Chapter I, Section 4
17. Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter I, Section 9
18. Ibid., Chapter I, Section 10

Note: Two short essays on the historical-critical method are recommended for further reading: "The Necessity and Function of Higher Criticism" by Oscar Cullmann in **The Early Church** (selected essays by Cullmann), Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1956; and "Die Bedeutung der historisch-kritischen Methode fur die protestantische Theologie und Kirche" by Gerhard Ebeling in **Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche,** 47 (1950), pp. 1 - 47.

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